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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISLAMABAD 001447

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TAGS: PGOV PK PREL

SUBJECT: ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER'S MEETING WITH
ASFUNDYAR WALI KHAN

Classified By: Peter W. Bodde, Reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: During a March 28 meeting with Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asian Affairs Richard

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Boucher, Awami National Party (ANP) leader Asfandyar Wali Khan clarified the government's plan to engage in dialogue with militants. Asfandyar said his party intends to hold talks--not with Al Qaeda and not with Baitullah Mehsud militants--but with members of the tribal population who might support local taliban. Asfandyar elaborated on his goal to integrate the Federally Administered Tribal Areas into the Northwest Frontier Province and to see the Political Parties Act extended to the tribal areas. He also discussed his efforts to reinvigorate the peace jirga with Afghanistan.
End Summary.

¶2. (C) Asfandyar said his party had performed better than he expected in February's National Assembly elections. The Awami National Party, he said, had called for Pakistan's Pashtuns to show the world their support for modernity and progress instead of militancy. In Asfandyar's opinion, the results of the election demonstrated the Pashtun people's rejection of religious extremism in favor of modern, secular parties like his.

¶3. (C) Asfandyar noted the alliance between the Pakistan People's Party and the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz was problematic. He said that his party and the People's Party have a similar perspective on key issues; Sharif's party, however, looks at Pakistan's problems in a much different way. He emphatically told Boucher that he did not want to see either the Ministry for the Federally Administered Tribal Areas or the Religious Affairs Ministry in the hands of the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam party.

Vision for Tribal Areas

¶4. (C) Asfandyar said that one of his main objectives in the new government was to incorporate the Tribal Areas more formally into the North-west Frontier Province. Asfandyar elaborated that he would like to see a cohesive policy for both areas run by a Peshawar-based Home Minister. He noted they--particularly in the areas adjacent to each other--often share the same problems, which are exacerbated by the red tape required for Peshawar and Islamabad to deconflict strategies with each other before taking action that affects

both areas.

¶ 15. (C) Asfundyar also wants the Political Parties Act extended into the Tribal Areas. Asfundyar was unconcerned that this move could destabilize the situation saying, "I took on the Islamists in Bannu and won; why shouldn't I take them on in Miranshah?" Asfundyar said that Islamic party leader Fazlur Rehman lost the election in his home district of D.I. Khan and only won in Bannu because local taliban intimidated voters and stuffed ballot boxes.

¶ 16. (C) Asfundyar said he looks forward to the Embassy's briefing on development efforts in the Tribal Areas and commented that he could not devise a more robust plan for the region's development until he learned what efforts were already underway. He said his party does not plan to be a "hands off" party but wants to work with the United States for progress in the Tribal region.

Plan for Tackling the Extremists

¶ 17. (C) Asfundyar appreciated cooperation with the USG in the war on terror, saying "we're in this together." Asfundyar said that there are four major stakeholders in regional counterterrorism efforts: Pakistan's government, the Pakistan Army, Afghanistan's government, and the coalition forces in Afghanistan. Asfundyar argued that each element must strategize with the others before taking action. He also argued that any action in the border areas must be planned with sensitivity to ground realities in that area.

¶ 18. (C) Asfundyar said Pashtuns had been dying for the past thirty years and it is time for this to stop. When clarifying plans to negotiate with militant forces, Asfundyar

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said he perceived four different groups: (a) primarily foreign elements in al-Qaeda; (b) local militants like Baitullah Mehsud; (c) local taliban and their tribal supporters; and (d) people in the settled regions bordering the Tribal Areas. Asfundyar explained that his party supports dialogue with people only in the third and fourth groups--i.e., those that provide assistance to local militants. Using Swat as an example, Asfundyar argued that he could effectively counter extremism if he could convince local people to deny militants transit routes and hospitality. He said a dialogue strategy must occur in conjunction with an economic and military strategy. Future peace agreements must include robust enforcement mechanisms because military intervention is necessary when dialogue fails.

An Advocate of Jirgas

¶ 19. (C) Asfundyar emphasized that jirgas are an important tool for solving problems in the region. He explained that proper jirgas involve more than just the opposing stakeholders; they also include neutral parties who then hold each side accountable for the jirgas' decisions. He encouraged the empowerment of the tribal elders over the maliks, who he claimed receive a stipend from the Political Agents and therefore are viewed by the populace as government yes-men. Asfundyar suggested the government involve the tribal elders in the jirga process, arguing they can be particularly effective if "foreigners" (i.e. Arabs, Uzbeks, and Turkmen) fail to respect the decisions of the jirga. If this occurs, Asfundyar explained, the tribal elders will call for the community to stand together and force the foreigners to observe jirga decisions. Asfundyar argued that if the Pakistan government rejects jirgas as a viable policy tool, then they have no choice but to move immediately to military action.

¶ 10. (C) Asfundyar said he was extremely involved in the

August 2007 Pakistan-Afghanistan Peace Jirga, which he said "forced" both governments to work together. Asfundyar told Boucher he is pushing a resolution in the National Assembly that reinforces the decisions made at the jirga last year, including regular meetings of the 25 member follow-up jirga committee, continued dialogue with opposition forces, eradication of poppy cultivation and narco-trafficking, bilateral development of border area infrastructure, denial of sanctuary to terrorists, and the expansion of cultural ties between Pakistan and Afghanistan. He said he anticipates this resolution will come before the National Assembly in one of its early sessions. Asfundyar also commented that some individuals, like Fazlur Rehman, who had boycotted the jirga now regretted they had not attended.

¶11. (C) Asfundyar said that his father and President Karzai's father had been close friends. Asfundyar informally meets with Karzai approximately once a month; he feels comfortable enough to have recently advised Karzai to "stop acting like a tribal elder and start acting like a professional politician." He also suggested to the Afghan President that he, Karzai, and newly elected Prime Minister Gillani meet informally to discuss bilateral issues. He told Boucher he hopes to see increased cooperation with Afghanistan on customs issues, trade, transit, and streamlined border crossings.

¶12. (U) Assistant Secretary Boucher has approved this message.
BODDE